

In order to select the Module 1 indicator that would have the most impact on my teaching and classroom environment during the literacy block and beyond, I began by having a conversation with my mentor regarding the current classroom environment, highlighting both strengths and areas in need of improvement in my classroom. We discussed pre-existing routines and procedures and their effects on the quality and quantity of the instructional time in my first grade classroom. Through this conversation, it became apparent to me that although I had taught and modeled routines and expectations at the start of the school year, there were several areas that were in need of modification.

I noticed that a significant amount of instructional and learning time was lost during the 90-minute literacy block due to the students' lack of understanding of the specific expectations and learning goals of each of the Daily Five literacy stations. Students were interrupting my guided reading groups to ask questions and inquire about materials needed for the task at hand. Additionally, I had to stop my small-group instruction to redirect off-task and disruptive behaviors at other stations throughout the room. Because of this, it was evident to me that I had to examine what was working and modify methods that were not contributing to a positive, effective learning environment.

I began my learning by working with my mentor to select a variety of resources that would support my growth and success across the continuum by effectively managing routines and procedures. The first resource I utilized was a video shown on the **American Psychological Association (APA)** website, titled *Practical Classroom Management*. This video defined classroom management as "a collection of teaching strategies that promote the self-regulation of behavior by students, in order to enable them to take maximum advantage of the available learning time" (6:37). This brought to mind the idea that if I wanted to make the most of every minute in the classroom, I needed to teach my students to be independent learners and resourceful thinkers. Another resource my mentor and I identified as a useful learning tool to help reach my goal is the book **Classroom Management that Works**, by Robert J. Marzano. This research-based book provides strategies and suggestions that all teachers can use to create a classroom management system that will best increase student engagement and achievement. Additionally, my mentor provided me with Chapter 2 of **Managing Challenging Behaviors in Schools**, by Lane et. al. This book also makes valuable suggestions for improving the effectiveness of routines and transitions in the classroom. Lane states that, "without an orderly, purposeful environment, educators cannot establish a classroom climate that fosters learning and collaboration." (p. 14)

The APA video suggests that students need to internalize teachers' expectations so they can be independent learners. Rules should be posted and materials displayed on the walls of the classroom should contribute to the sense of community in the classroom. Lane states that students require a predictable, yet engaging routine. Marzano highlights the importance of involving students in the formation of classroom rules and procedures. When students contribute their thoughts and opinions about the rules, they feel a sense of ownership and responsibility and therefore have a much stronger tie to them. Because of this new learning, I made sure to revisit expectations to ensure that they were explained and modeled elaborately. I posted "I can" signs for each literacy station in their designated section of the room so that students can independently remind themselves of the expectations at each station. I now continue to clearly and consistently restate all rules and expectations often. Our class behavior promise, written in a straightforward, positive manner, that we made together and all signed is posted on the wall near the meeting area and referred to occasionally as a reminder. As a class we came up with a simple, silent hand gesture that we use as a friendly reminder of our behavior promise for others and ourselves. Our school-wide PBIS stoplight behavior clip chart is hung in the middle of the room and easily accessible and visible to all students from any area of the room. There are also posters about being a good citizen and having good character posted throughout the room. To ensure a predictable, yet engaging routine like Lane suggests, I taught my class a call and response saying that I use to get their full attention at anytime throughout the day and transition them through stations during the literacy block. I say "hands on top," to which they stop what they are doing, put their hands on their heads and say, "that means stop." Then I say "one, two, three" and they respond with "eyes on me."

All of these changes, including verbal, non-verbal, and visual cues, have had a noticeably positive effect on the behaviors of all of my students. Students know what is expected of them at each time of the day, in different learning environments. Sixteen of the eighteen students consistently follow our rules with little or no redirection. Two students need more redirection than the others; however they too have made noticeable improvement with the changes that I have made. Because we created our class behavior promise together, the students feel accountable for it. We talk frequently about how our class is a community, and we must work together with helping hands and kind words, instead of hurting hands and words. The students react very positively and maturely to reminders and references to posters and behavior expectations throughout the room. It is definitely a successful means to refresh the students' memories of appropriate classroom behavior. At times, I pause instruction for a few seconds to wait for all students' attention, and I have witnessed many

students silently hand gesture talkative friends to remind them of our promise to respect the speaker. As soon as the student being gestured notices the symbol, he quickly stops talking and turns his attention to me. Our “hands on top” attention-grabber has proved to be popular with the students and very successful at quickly getting the entire class to “whole-body listen”. At times, some students do not stop what they are doing to put their hands on their head, so I respond to this by saying, “hands on top” again until I have full participation. This has served to make the expectation clear that it is not a choice, and I require all students to adhere to this procedure and transition.

Managing Challenging Behaviors in Schools advocates that orderly classrooms help support student learning because they increase academic learning time. I learned that the organization and physical arrangement of a classroom plays a vital role in the productivity of the class and tone of the room. Lane suggests that the setup of the room should allow for teachers and support staff to be able to scan the room and see all students. Additionally, there should be room to navigate fluidly without heavy traffic, and a quiet space for students to “cool off” when angry or over-stimulated. There should be areas devoted to materials that students can access independently, as well as specific procedures concerning how and when students get their materials, and what to do when materials need to be replenished. Marzano states that rules and procedures concerning the use of materials in the classroom should address the following areas: Distributing materials, collecting materials, storage of common materials, the teacher’s desk and storage areas, students’ desks and storage areas, and the use of the drinking fountain, sink, bathroom, and pencil sharpener. Teaching, modeling, practicing, and reinforcing specific procedures in all of these areas helps clarify confusion and allow for more time and energy devoted to instruction and learning.

After examining the benefits of each of the seating arrangements Lane suggests, I changed the arrangement of my students’ desks and assigned each student a “carpet spot” for meeting on the rug. I now have three groups of four/five desks facing each other in groups, and at the front of the room I have two pairs of desks facing forward. The placements of students’ desks were strategic based on academic levels and abilities to stay on task and participate. In each of the pairs of desks at the front of the room, I have two students who frequently engage in off task behaviors. There is a single desk in the back of the room for students who require “cool-off” time. The placement of my kidney-shaped guided reading table is in the front corner of the room, making all other sections easily visible at a glance.

The new seating arrangement in my classroom has suited my teaching style and learning activities very well as it promotes interaction of the teacher with the students, as well as positive interaction of the students with each other. The two students that were placed in the front row, facing the whiteboard, with a well-behaved student next to them, have been more on task and less likely to engage in undesired behaviors. Because of the assigned seats on the rug, I no longer hear time-wasting comments such as "move over, I got here first, I want to sit here, you always sit next to him, etc." More time can be devoted to learning because I spend less time addressing seating arrangement issues. The new set-up of the room and guided reading table permits constant monitoring and simple redirection of any off task behavior, contributing to the increase in academic learning time.

After reading about all the different procedures and routines needed for all of the required materials in a first grade class, I made many changes to help alleviate much of the time spent on materials. I provided each student with a pencil box containing two pencils, an eraser, a glue stick, scissors, an 8-pack of crayons, a white-board eraser, and a dry-erase marker. Students were taught that they should have these materials in their boxes at all times for use at their desks and in literacy or math stations. There are labeled drawers in the writing center that contain extra glue, white-board materials, and scissors, with sharing crayon baskets on top. Our class now has an established and practiced procedure for obtaining a sharpened pencil. At the back of the room there are two cups, labeled "sharpened" and "needs sharpening". When a student's pencil tip breaks, they may quietly head to the back of the room, drop their broken pencil in the "needs sharpening" cup, and take a sharpened one back to their seat. At the end of the day, whichever student has been assigned the pencil-sharpening job for the week sharpens the pencils in the "needs sharpening" cup and places them in the "sharpened" cup for use the following day. Students who need a drink silently hold up one finger and when they need to use the bathroom they make the Sign Language gesture for bathroom. Students then wait for a nod or headshake from me signaling whether they may go or not.

Since making these changes in the organization of materials and procedures relating to their use, I have seen a considerable amount of time shifted from materials to instruction. Students have all required materials in their pencil boxes and know where to go if they are missing a material or need something that may not be in their pencil boxes. When I gave each student their pencil box and explained how they would be used, the students were excited and eager to have ownership and of the materials and independence pertaining to their use and replenishment. When I first introduced the silent drink and bathroom gestures, many students were still

raising their hand at inappropriate times and interrupting to ask to use the facilities. Whenever they did this, I reminded them that there is a right way to ask and would not give them permission until they demonstrated the correct procedure. Presently, all eighteen students successfully adhere to this procedure, contributing to the goal of more time devoted to learning.

Positive teacher-student relationships are critical for successful classroom management. Disciplinary interventions should include a healthy balance between positive consequences for appropriate behavior and negative consequences for inappropriate behavior. When watching the APA video, I learned that the more students are actively engaged in a lesson, the more attentive they are, causing greater learning. Students must be motivated to be fully engaged in the learning task, rather than focusing on misbehavior. Additionally, the video explained that for students engaging in inappropriate behavior, a continuum of possible consequences should be available that can be geared to the seriousness of the offense. These consequences should be fair, objective, structured, and delivered in a brief and non-emotional manner, with no grudges held. The research I did using Lane's book on classroom management furthered my knowledge by describing the importance of minimizing the use of reactive behavior management strategies by utilizing proactive behavior management strategies. She suggests offering students reinforcement for meeting classroom expectations to increase the frequency of positive behaviors and suppress negative ones.

Throughout the day, and with a strong focus during morning meeting, I work to convey the message to my students that they are all very special and important to me. I have made it very clear that I am interested in and concerned with all of their needs, as well as that I am the one in charge. I explain that I am responsible for keeping them safe and helping them become better learners and community members. I infuse humor and dramatizations throughout my instruction and closely follow the Socratic method of teaching, encouraging risk-taking when using inquiry and asking higher-order thinking questions. I publicly and consistently reinforce positive behavior that demonstrates protecting learning time. I try to ignore some negative behaviors, but if a behavior must be addressed, I try to be more quiet and one-on-one about it as to not draw attention to the behaviors and reinforce them.

I also have implemented a group contingent positive reinforcement for the whole class. We have a class compliment jar and anytime another teacher or I give the entire class a compliment for walking nicely in the hallway, sitting "criss-cross applesauce", etc., a stone is added to our jar and a whole-group reward is given when the jar is full. For individual

positive reinforcement, I use both verbal and non-verbal praise very frequently. Additionally, I have a basket that says "Ms. K's Heart" and when students deserve special recognition for a desired behavior, I ask them to write their names on a heart cutout and put it in the basket. Each morning before we begin Morning Meeting, I pick a name from the basket and that student has the privilege of sitting in the ottoman instead of their regular carpet spot.

The impact of these adjustments on my students' behavior, influencing the amount of time devoted to instruction, has been exceptional. Because I have built such a strong sense of community, trust, and respect between my students and myself, I have found that they more readily accept the rules and procedures of the class. Some students have randomly commented on their sense of being loved and cared for by their teacher. When they are not meeting my expectations I tell them that I am sad because I know they are capable of making better choices, and they almost immediately turn the behavior around in an effort to please me. When there are consequences for their violation of the rules, they tend to understand that they are responsible for what happened and do not try to object the consequence. The use of questioning strategies to promote critical thinking and discussion among my class has served to better keep the students engaged and involved in the material being taught. My students are eager and comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas on a topic, even if it is new material and their answer may not be 'right'. This investment in the lessons has increased positive, appropriate participation and minimized disruptive, off-task participation. The students have reacted very positively to the reinforcement and attention that I give them when they are meeting expectations. When negative behaviors are quietly addressed, students seem to respect me more for not embarrassing them. Additionally, most students are less likely to repeat the behavior if its goal was peer attention. The class loves our whole-group reward jar, and is eager to fill it and earn a class-wide reward. We talk about how we are a family and a community and every single student must work together to earn a stone.

Through my research and the assistance of my mentor, I have learned a lot in regards to establishing and managing routines and procedures in my classroom. The changes that I have made as a result of my new learning have had a very positive effect on my students and the learning environment in my classroom. I have seen positive behaviors increase and negative behaviors decrease, resulting in my ultimate goal of having more independent students and more time devoted to instruction and learning.